



Mary Thomas of Old Crow

Whitehorse Star photo

OLD CROW YUKON PERIMETER OF PARADISE

BY IRIS WARNER

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Old Crow, the village of the Vunta Kutchin Indians on the Porcupine River in the northern part of Yukon Territory, was an unknown on the edge of the world until Edith

Josie began putting it on the map more than a dozen years ago. Miss Josie is the Old Crow correspondent for *The Whitehorse Star* and writes in a fashion that is wholly her own. Her news columns in the *Star* began to be reprinted in other newspapers, in Canada and the United States, and several collections of her writings have been published by the *Star*.

As Miss Josie put it: "Old Crow is a small town and not many people and not many white. Like 1930 or 1954 nobody know about Old Crow but I am pretty sure that people know Old Crow since the news go all over Canada and the States."

But something more was needed, and now Iris Warner of Whitehorse has gathered up a great deal of information about the Vunta Kutchin from their early nomadic wanderings in pursuit of the caribou herds to their establishment of the village on the Porcupine at the mouth of the Old Crow River in 1912, and the story of that village during the past 60 years. The years saw trading posts come and go, the establishment of a church and school, the rise and fall of fur prices, the coming of the airplane and rapid communication with the rest of the world.

The whole has been wrapped up in an attractive booklet, "Old Crow, Yukon: Perimeter of Paradise," printed by *The Whitehorse Star* with a fine color cover picture of Mary Thomas of Old Crow. It is available from *The Whitehorse Star*.

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Fort Yukon: Hudson's Bay Company Post.

THE ABOVE gentleman 'Saveeah' (Sha-Vah) the principal chief of the Kootcha-Kootchin (Kutchin) was present while I was sketching the others, and remarked that he did not see himself among them. I offered to take his likeness to send to the Great White Chief, and he has been sitting for the last half-hour with his best face on."

Test and sketch from "Journal of the Yukon" - by Alexander Murray (Yukon Archives)



Sha-Vah

PERIMETER OF PARADISE

Old Crow, Yukon

By Iris Warner

The Old Crow conjured up by the newspaper accounts of Edith Josie is truly a place of dreams to most people; the last outpost of *the simple life* where hunters hunt, women work, family ties are *the way it used to be*. In order to move the village out of Utopia and into its rightful place on the map of Yukon, it seems necessary to people at first; to turn the time-clock back to the wandering Indian tribes whose only problem was survival.

For 10,000 years and over 10,000 square miles of the central Yukon plateau, the Indians of the Vuntut Kutchin ranged on the trail of wandering caribou herds. Kutchin (the people) were divided into tribes, of which the better known are the Loucheux, the Han and Tutchone. Nomadic, primitive, they lived for generation after generation in the coldest inhabited region of North America. Either Crow or Wolf people; they seldom married into the same clan, while the children took the clan of their mother.

Originally, armed with knives of stone or bone, with bows and bone-tipped arrows, using age-old methods of snares and dead-falls, the Kutchin ranged from inside Alaska across the Yukon and into the Mackenzie River district of the Northwest Territories. Their economy, and indeed their lives, depended on the herds of caribou which migrated within a restricted range bounded by the Barn, British, Keele and Rocky Mountains.

Entire herds of caribou were slaughtered after being driven into funnels made of tall posts hung with moss and representing men. Panic-stricken and racing blindly, they broke for openings set with rawhide snares, were caught and killed. Individually owned, these 'surrounds' sometimes measured 1½ miles across.

Large snares, attached to logs, hung over trails and caught wandering caribou or even moose, the anchor-log eventually catching in brush and trapping the animals for easy slaughter with primitive weapons. Caribou swimming across rivers, were killed from canoes by Kutchin armed with bone-tipped lances.

Even the formidable grizzly was brought down, by hunters with nerves of steel. Encouraging a bear to attack, the hunter knelt and held the butt of a six-foot bear spear against the ground, the steel blade aimed at its throat. Although the bear were killed whenever encountered, the meat was palatable only in winter.

Early Kutchin hunted the tasty porcupine, and trapped the beaver for fur and food, so intensively in fact that these animals are now common only in the remote headwaters of the Porcupine River. Lynx were trapped to the same extreme as well as black and grizzly bear and wolverine, which destroyed caches of food and equipment. Wolves, that preyed on the caribou, were brought down whenever possible.

Fast-running rivers encouraged canoe travel and birchbark canoes were used in early times. However, what birch trees grew in the region were not very large and so canoes were built or traded-for, when hunters journeyed down the Yukon River. Trappers devised snowshoes -- a hunting 'shoe for fresh snow and equal to the wearer's height and a smaller one for down a trail.

Since the women did the work, a woman may have been the first to see the possibilities in hard, dry, perhaps frozen caribou hides. Perhaps she bent one up in front, poked a couple of holes for a rawhide thong and piled her load on the first sled. A wooden sled gradually evolved, turned up fore and aft, which was used on narrow trails. Dogs carried back-packs in summer; their use as sled dogs came with the white traders in the 1800s.

There were otter, fox, weasel and squirrel in the region, sheep in the mountains of the Upper Porcupine and moose wherever they could be found. Each year, muskrat trapping drew the people to the Old Crow Flats, the largest concentration of muskrat in Canada.

The central Yukon is the most important waterfowl breeding grounds in the territory, with a density of 87 birds per square mile. To the Kutchin it offered unlimited ducks and geese as well as loons and ptarmigan.

Although the caribou was the staff of life for both man and dogs, fish have been netted, speared and trapped from time immemorial. King salmon, from 18 to 50 pounds, have always been prized for their tasty flesh, with dog salmon, whitefish, grayling, loche, sucker and jackfish being netted in hundreds and thousands each year.

The men made fish "baskets" of willows bound with babiche, or strips of hide, wetted and cut into strings. The baskets were 10' long and 4' wide,

with one end on the riverbottom, the other floating on top of the water. Fish entering the mouth of the basket were pushed to the upper end with racquets (or flat woven bats) and killed with clubs.

Despite their great size and weight, King salmon were caught by men in flimsy canoes, each carrying a bag 5' deep with a 3' mouth, at the end of a 9' pole.

A man on shore spotted the ripple of ascending salmon and signaled to the canoes. The fisherman paddled ahead of the fish and pushed his net to the bottom directly in front of it. When the salmon entered the bag, it was pulled to the surface and stabbed with a knife on a 5' pole. A struggling fish could sink or upset the canoe so that managing the poles, the net, the knife and the frail unwieldy craft on the rushing river, called for great skill.

Pike and whitefish in small streams, were caught with a lure -- a fish made out of bone and hung on a line in the water. When the fish approached, it was speared with a jointed spear similar to the Eskimo weapon.

And then there was the trip over the mountains to Fish Hole, on the Firth River. Although the river was frozen by October, the Fish Hole, half-way up a glacier near the headwaters, was still open and Arctic char in swarms, offered ready game to both Indians and Eskimo who netted them in huge quantities. Here also, the Kutchin met the Polar bear which they killed for its marvellous white coat.

In the old times meat was shared by all. As well, families separated to hunt with other partners so that possible failure of one party could be off-set by success of another, with all of a party sharing the kill.

Some hunters, to ensure strength, drank the blood of the caribou. A source of Vitamin C was greens found in the first stomach of the animal, first washed, then eaten as salad. At times the entire pouch and contents was set on top of a fire to dry and ferment. A grease was made by smashing bones with stone hammers, the small pieces put into kettles with a little water and allowed to simmer until the grease floated to the top, was skimmed off and saved. This 'bone grease' when added to the fermented stomach contents, made a nourishing meal.

Berries, picked and dried, rounded out their diet of meat and fish.

The meat itself was eaten freshly cooked, particularly the liver and kidney. At times it was cut into narrow strips and dried, or in winter, frozen. It was stored in a cache, a small cabin raised on four poles to keep out predators. The dried meat could be soaked awhile, then boiled and eaten. Or, if pemmican was needed to eat on the trail, dried meat was pounded to powder and mixed with bone-grease and sometimes berries. That delicacy, the head of the animal, was cut into four and boiled, or roasted over the fire. Caribou meat also fed the dogs, which often made serious inroads on a winter's food supply.

The spring and fall caribou migrations drew the people to Crow Mountain where large meat camps were established. Fishing through the ice began in September and continued all winter. Dead-falls and snares were set for fur-bearing animals. Muskrat trapping in Crow Flats occupied the weeks from April to mid-June and when it was over summer had arrived giving everyone time for restful contemplation of nature's goodness. The cutting of sufficient firewood for the winter was an autumn occupation. Life was, as one old Indian put it, close to the 'fur, wood and caribou.'



THE ORIGINAL Kutchin Indians, the people of Old Crow in the central Yukon.

Tanned skins were made into clothing -- a parka and trousers -- while the thicker moose-hide was used for moccasins or heavy clothing. Moose, although numerous, were hunted casually and did not mean life or death to the Kutchin, as did the caribou. But one moose yielded many times the meat of the caribou and when one was killed -- by hunters surrounding an island on which one was seen, or running it down on snowshoes -- feasts were given.

Primitive Kutchin ate what they shot or caught, wore what they tanned, used tools of their own manufacture out of moose or caribou horn or bone. Their dishes were of wood; horn spoons were often large enough to hold a pint or more. Kettles were of woven tamarack roots decorated with hair and sometimes, dyed porcupine quills, while another cooking pot was nothing more than a hole in the ground. Lined with a caribou skin, water was made to boil in it by adding red-hot stones.

Clothing for adults consisted of jacket-trousers-cap of hide or fur while children wore skirts with mittens and a hood attached. The young women tattooed lines down their chins by puncturing the skin and rubbing in black lead; the men favoured a hole between their nostrils

where they hung a metal ring or one decorated with dentalium shells.

Disease and injury cut sharply into families. Eskimos were their enemies; battles were fierce with the victors carrying off the women. Valued also were dentalium shells, which were symbols of wealth to both people. Alcohol was non-existent although tobacco was encountered early, as the Indians assisted the initial fur traders, sailors and whalers.

With their lives determined by the caribou, their destiny in the hands of shamans or witch-doctors, their laws enforced by elected chiefs who were often wise and good men, the Kutchin lived simple, hard lives for thousands of years. Until the coming of the white man -- Russian, American, British -- whose guns reduced the herds and whose trading disrupted the people.

It was John Bell of the Hudson's Bay Company who named the Yukon River (after the Indian word), a name which stuck despite many other names attached to its length by the Russian fur traders, American surveyors and Hudson's Bay men who were exploring this new region for furs and commerce. Sparked in part by Russia's territorial ambitions and the fur traders' and whalers' greed, the primitive Kutchin were turned away from the migrating herds into a swifter stream.

Russia was then engaged in fishing off the North American coast of what became Alaska, and trading in furs up the Yukon River. The Czar went too far, however, when he closed the Bering Sea to all but Russian shipping. Great Britain and the United States objecting to this closing of an open sea, persuaded Russia via the Anglo-Russian Treaty of 1825 to withdraw her claim. This treaty established the first rough boundary between Alaska and Yukon, at the 141st meridian.

These Arctic negotiations directed North American thoughts and eyes northward. Just why had Russia been interested -- or Britain and the United States? Was it really all ice and snow, or could people live there? Was it worth exploiting -- for furs or minerals?

Furs there were. The Russians on the coast and the Hudson's Bay Company throughout northern Canada had, for decades, kept word of their secret cache from the rest of the world. When the Company reached the Mackenzie River establishing Fort Mackenzie and other posts, its traders heard of an equally great river further to the west. The Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, Sir George Simpson, gave Robert Campbell the task of looking for furs in all the unknown rivers and lakes across the Rockies. Leaving in 1840, Campbell travelled extensively, setting up several trading posts along the way, and, continuing on down the Yukon River he found another Bay post already established, on Bell's advice, at Fort Yukon.

The construction of Fort Yukon, two miles above the confluence of the Porcupine on the Yukon, put a trader among the Vunta Kutchin of the central Yukon plateau. Built by Alexander Hunter

Murray in 1847, with log buildings and firm bastions for defence in a hostile, lonely land, it was the farthest west of a series of forts extending from Fort Simpson (itself remote) more than 1,000 miles. Goods sent out for trade yielded profit only after a seven year wait. They were hauled summer after summer from York Factory to Norway House to Peel's River, over the mountains that winter to LaPierre's House and the following summer down the Porcupine to Fort Yukon.

There they were sold, and the furs taken in trade returned the same slow way. The Indians became packers for the Hudson's Bay Company, developing incredible stamina, necessary over portages of sixty miles or more.

Gardening was introduced at Fort Yukon despite its location almost on the Arctic Circle. Reports of potatoes and other vegetables being raised and barley ripening countered ideas that the northland was only ice and snow.

Lacking dominion of all the waters and land it formerly used at will, Russia agreed to sell the ice box country to the United States, eastward to the 141st meridian defined by the Treaty of St. Petersburg. While negotiations went on at high levels of government, an exploring party of the Western Union Telegraph Company spent 1866-'67 in the Yukon watershed, setting out a route for a globe-encircling telegraph wire, an opportunity for Western Union caused by the failure in 1858, of the Atlantic cable of Great Eastern. Competition drove Western Union to attempt an alternate route around the world but it also hastened Great Eastern's efforts to lay another cable which it did successfully in 1866. With international communication again ensured, the Western Union efforts were cancelled. However, word was slow getting into the far north and it was a year before the news reached the men in the field.

In the meantime these notables, Dall and Laberge among them, guided and assisted by the Indians, hiked and mapped and cut line all through the Yukon and made prodigious and meticulous reports. Slowly the edge was being taken off the mystery of the wild cold north.

With the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867 and the Russian withdrawal, the existence of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Yukon became untenable. A report to the U.S. Secretary of War from one American trader advised that, according to maps of the Western Union Telegraph Exploring Expedition, the fort was 125 miles inside Alaskan territory ... and worse, doing a roaring business.

Implementing an old act passed 33 years previous, President Andrew Johnson directed the removal by military force, of all persons found within American territory according to law. Captain Charles W. Raymond of the U.S. Corps of Engineers was instructed to determine the latitude and longitude of Fort Yukon, to ascertain Company trade within the American territory, and as Customs representative, to find what amount of goods were brought by them from British territory.

The Russian-American Company, which had been trading on the Yukon River, was bought out in 1868, the year after the Alaska purchase, by the San Francisco firm of Hutchinson, Kohl & Co. When Capt. Raymond left California for the north he was accompanied by John Parrott of that company. Also aboard was Michael Laberge of the Western Union Telegraph, who had taken charge of the Parrott & Co. post at Nulato on the Yukon River in Alaska. Further confusion ensued after arrival when Paul Zandt, agent for another firm, claimed that it had been authorized to succeed the Russian-American Fur Company and had also arranged to buy the Hudson's Bay interests in Fort Yukon.

Aboard the boat from San Francisco was a dismantled river steamer which was put together at St. Michael's and became the first

and its tributaries, familiarizing the Indians of the region with the work of the church. On this trip a sermon was preached to Indians who were fishing at the mouth of what later became known as the Klondike River. Like the Russian and Hudson's Bay traders, the missionary found gold; like them he kept it secret preferring to preach the Gospel. He married a Loucheux woman and had several children, one of whom is Neil McDonald, of Old Crow.

With the help of his wife he was successful in translating the Bible and the Book of Prayer into the syllabic language devised by the church. Rev. Mr. Bompas who had studied the Indians' language while at Fort Simpson, arrived at Fort Yukon in July 1869 and was on hand to report events as Captain Raymond ran up the Stars and Stripes.



FORT YUKON, ALASKA.

PHOTO BY ROBERTSON

steamer on the Yukon River. Advance warning of Raymond's visit was sent to James McDougall, in charge of the fort, from the Chief Factor at Victoria. McDougall was away and Raymond, having travelled upriver in the pioneer steamer, appropriately named "Yukon" - was received by John Wilson accompanied by Rev. W.C. Bompas, newly arrived from Fort Simpson.

The work of the Anglican church in Yukon had begun in 1861 with the journey of Rev. W.W. Kirkby from Fort Simpson over the mountains to Fort Yukon, for a week's visit of the post and Indians. The success of his journey was reported to a missionary meeting in Red River Settlement and Robert McDonald offered to go north and open the field for the church.

Arriving in the fall of '62 he established the first mission and began travelling the Yukon River

Since his survey proved Fort Yukon to be within the new American territory, Capt. Raymond ordered the Hudson's Bay factor, Mr. McDougall, to move a rough distance up the Porcupine River, thus indirectly giving the first position of the boundary. The Company retaliated by appealing for similar Canadian law. The Company & the Canadian government were concerned particularly in light of Mr. Bompas report that agents of the two American companies at Fort Yukon had been making inquiries regarding the Mackenzie River and a third company was forming in San Francisco for Mackenzie River trade under the name The English Fur Co.

It was with some satisfaction that Factor John Wilson wrote "the Indians will have nothing to do with the Yankees, and if the Company will not build up above, will trade at LaPierre's House."

Thus Fort Yukon, of log walls and sturdy

bastions, fell into American hands and was run for a time by Moses Mercier of Montreal, whose brother was trader at St. Michael's. The ways of the Hudson's Bay Company had become slow, more the Indian way of trading, and not to Mercier's liking. Since the Indians who stayed with the fort were used to the old ways, Mercier felt it better and easier to 'break in' a new crowd, and moved his post up the Yukon River 190 miles, to Belle Isle (which later became Fort Eagle). Fort Yukon was abandoned to become firewood for every passing steamer or washed away by the encroaching river until only a little graveyard was left under the hill.

These were the days of Yukon pioneers McQuesten, Harper, Mayo, Ed Schiefflin and Ladue who gradually developed trade to the extent that boats by the hundreds began to run the rivers. Indians along the Yukon River were prevailed upon to cut wood for the omniverous steamers, thus earning money, not goods, for their labour.

Almost three hundred of the Fort Yukon Indians moved with the Hudson's Bay trader to the new location which he called Rampart House, as the Ramparts are a prominent feature of the Porcupine River. The Chief at that time was Senatee, whose camp was six days travel up the Porcupine. The most powerful chief in the entire



SHA-NEU-TTI- Brother of Sha-Vah - possibly senatee.

Yukon, he had been a fierce and cruel warrior in his youth but mellowed with age into patience and wisdom. Despite the cooperation of Chief Senatee and much trading with the Indians, the new post did not do as well as Fort Yukon. One report reads "it was operated more to keep faith with the Indians than to profit." It served also as a deterrent to encroaching traders from the west.

Gold was being discovered along the Yukon Rivers and its tributaries, in spite of the silence invoked by the traders. It was becoming important to establish a boundary. In 1887-'89 William Ogilvie, Dominion Land Surveyor, determined the 141st meridian for Canada while John Henry Turner of the Coast and Geodetic Survey located for the United States. Working with a minimum of equipment and under rugged conditions, they set the border so well that a new survey twenty years later which was aided by telegraph and many more men and horses, found the determination at most, only a few feet from the correct position. Ogilvie reported "the Indians of Rampart House and other places affected by men of the church, were most religious and sincere in their faith and following the teachings."

John Henry Turner's preliminary observations proved Rampart House almost twenty miles west of the boundary. On August 8, 1889 the approximately location was determined and a campsite chosen and named Camp Colonna. His work continued all winter and included a trip to the Arctic Ocean to establish that Herschel Island, the centre of Arctic whaling, was in fact, Canadian. When the surveyors left the Porcupine River the people at Rampart House moved half-a-mile east to the deserted camp, with the Hudson's Bay post requisitioning the main house, 50' x 15' with an additional 15' x 20' projecting T. The old fort was burned and the new one named New Rampart House.

Some Indians did not move, notably John Deacon, a giant of a man who lived to be over 80. The last of the Company's Porcupine River trappers he was still at Old Rampart House when the boundary was re-surveyed, in 1911.

The Company's post at Rampart House adjoined the Anglican mission, St. Luke's. The first minister Mr. Sim, was followed by Wallis who was joined by his wife and later by Archdeacon and Mrs. Canham. Although Fort Yukon had been abandoned, the ministry continued at intervals, and in 1893 Bishop Bompas and Archdeacon Canham spent six weeks there. Holding daily service they also began some schooling for the children, a task that was relieved, the Bishop wrote, "by the arrival of the schoolmistress from Rampart House." When gold was discovered in the Klondike, money allocated to the erstwhile important diggings at Fortymile was diverted to the new camp at Dawson City, where a small log church was built in the government reserve and named St. Paul's.

Although this new gold discovery in 1896 meant almost complete abandonment of mining communities such as Circle City and Fortymile, at Rampart House trapping, not gold occupied most of the people. The big rush did add new men to the region, and did introduce the Kutchin to all sorts and conditions of men as did the whaling out of Herschel Island on the Arctic coast. When the isolation and desolation of tiny Herschel drove men to head south to civilization, there was nowhere for them to go. Many died in the mountains and rivers, but others, guided by

fate or perhaps a friendly Indian, ended up at Rampart House and were looked after by the Mission.

The Hudson's Bay Company, distressed by low returns, abandoned its posts in the Yukon in 1893 and moved back -- lock, stock and barrel -- to Fort McPherson, on the Mackenzie River. Early in its trading, the Company had established the practice of dealing only with Company-appointed tribal chiefs rather than all hunter-trappers. These were not tribal leaders but *middlemen* with whom the Company contracted for supplies or caribou and waterfowl, and expected them to *promote* the fur trade among their own people. To the Eskimos on the coast, who had no chiefs, such middlemen were at first incomprehensible. But, even there, it was easier for a trader to watch for the most active and influential man in the community and appoint him representative, than to deal with individuals. Among the Kutchin, trading chiefs had collected the furs and taken them regularly to Fort Yukon, and to Old and later New Rampart House, and at times to Fort McPherson or even Herschel Island.

The last of the trading chiefs of the Tukuth tribe, who were Kutchin of the Upper Porcupine, was Assak. Accompanied by some of his people, Assak regularly arrived at Fort McPherson just ahead of the first riverboat of the year, received his bonus and gave a party. This bonus included 100 lbs. flour, 50 lbs. sugar, rice and other food and was traditionally awarded its trading chiefs by the Company.

One year old Assak failed to arrive at the post, and the bonus was discontinued.

An example of the nomadic life followed by the Indians of Yukon until very recently: One man and his wife regularly left Fort McPherson by dogteam and ran the hundreds of miles northwest to Herschel Island, arriving in the spring. Leaving the Arctic coast they went south over the Richardson Mountains to a caribou 'surround' and joined others in the spring hunt. With break-up they were able to run the Crow River to the Flats for a summer's fishing, using fish-traps. In the fall they went back to the 'surround' and joined a dozen families in the big autumn caribou hunt. Although the men had guns, snares were used to save ammunition.

The couple spent the winter with others in caribou-skin houses, near this plentiful supply of caribou meat and dried fish. The man trapped fox, wolverine and wolves in the nearby mountains. They broke the winter with trips to take their furs to the Hudson's Bay post at Herschel and in the spring moved back to the island for a time, before carrying the mail to Fort McPherson.

It was time once more for the caribou hunt, and they travelled to the 'surround' to camp with other returning families. The hunter's successful trapping was indicated by his use of valuable ammunition, as his bag of 70 caribou was reported mostly shot. Marten trapping

followed, at Dev Lord Creek, and the furs were taken to Fort McPherson. The hunter waited for the Mackenzie River ice to go out and the exciting arrival of the riverboat, trading his furs for matches, tobacco, tea, clothing and ammunition.

Leaving the excitement of the fort, the trapper and his wife travelled upriver to LaPierre's House, made a log raft and ran the Porcupine River to Old Crow where others had gathered. The men fished with nets for dog salmon and in October they shot caribou.

This was their life, year after year, until one autumn when, as his wife and the other women dried fish and meat and began to make the winter's caribou-skin dwellings, a traveller brought word of the trader Dan Cadzow who had reopened the post at Rampart House.

With that, the nomadic journeys to the trading posts at McPherson and Herschel Island became, like the trading chiefs' bonus, things of the past. To the Indians' satisfaction, Cadzow ran the post in the traditional Hudson's Bay manner. A small creek divided New Rampart House and on one side he built a two-storey log post with dwelling, calling it the "largest house in Canada north of the Arctic Circle".

The people at New Rampart House were stricken by a smallpox epidemic in 1911, possibly brought from Dawson City which was one of many Yukon places affected by the outbreak. A new boundary survey was being run so that government men were on hand to help when 60 of the Indians were affected. An island was used as an isolation hospital while the healthy people were supplied with tents and food and urged to move to the hills. The Canadian government hurriedly set up a proper hospital with a staff on the island, its speed resulting in only one death, a child.

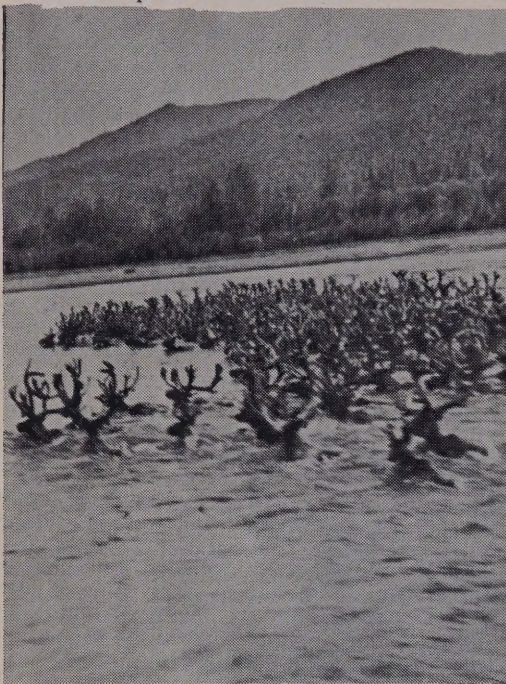
Despite the epidemic, that year is remembered by the Indians for the horses which accompanied the survey party. Calling the *big dogs* that would be a help to a man on his trapline, or hunting, they first ran from and then tried to ride them.

That year, 1912, the people burned the contaminated buildings and moved 40 miles to their hunting grounds at the place where the Porcupine River joined with the Crow. The name Crow appears often in the region and is a remembrance of Chief Walking Crow (Tetrahin Gevitik) sometimes Charlie Crow, who had a cabin and hunted in the area. Which is how it came to pass that the nomadic Kutchin settled at Old Crow.

End of Part One

The southern Canadian may yearn for the lonely trail, the solitary cabin, the peace and privacy of the northwoods -- fleeing, if only in dreams, his overcrowded society. Not so the Indian of central Yukon -- for this is his home, the trails his streets and lanes, the woods his neighborhood. His normal society is family and friends; he knows that the success of a man's life depends upon his own trapping and hunting, his wife's sewing and cooking, his children's eagerness to follow in their parents' moccasins.

To the city dweller duck hunting season is *life in the raw* -- primeval man (him) armed (with a



CARIBOU

fine gun) against the wilderness (a nearby swamp and sociable flocks of wild fowl). His bag may be ten birds -- which his wife won't clean or pluck or eat so that he gives it all away. Follow these ten birds with a thousand, those first exciting days with 30-60-90; even hunting would pall. The wealthy big-game hunter follows the same pattern -- to one sheep, goat, moose, bear, caribou. His Indian guide, however, sees weeks and months of patient tracking, stalking, shooting, butchering, packing, if he is to feed his family. Even today to sustain the people of Old Crow for one year, 5,000 caribou and literally tons of fish are required.

Although the people had settled at Old Crow, the increased market for furs made for longer and longer winter traplines with 75-500 traps in each and radiating in all directions. Small, usually-harmonious, trapper-family groups formed at Whitestone Village (250 miles upriver) and at Salmon Cache, Dev Lord (Lord was a white trapper) Johnson and Bluestone Creeks. The main thoroughfare between the villages in winter and summer was the Porcupine River.

Whites, and some Indian traders, got into the profitable fur trade. Among them were partners, O. Schultz and B. Johnson, who in 1912 built the first store in Old Crow.

Inevitably the trader, not the chief, became the moving force in the village. His dollar-and-cents values gradually supplanted the life-or-death value of the hunter to his tribe or family. The trader introduced steel traps in place of the old dead-falls, while boats of wood, rather than moosehide, were made possible by the traders' stocks of iron tools, knives, steel needles and files.

For a number of years Schultz and Johnson bought their supplies from the Northern Commercial Company at Fort Yukon, moving them upriver by powered riverboat. The Old Crow store was closed however, with the dropping of the muskrat market in 1920.

But, by that time Old Crow had evolved into a village. First the store, then a mission church and school, set about with neat log cabins and tree-high caches, and a police detachment. The RCMP which had moved with the trader, brought along the tin roof and other parts of their old detachment at New Rampart House.

That the old ways were hard could be guessed from the extraordinary speed with which the Kutchin switched from the nomadic to a sedentary life. Men looked for jobs that would keep them around the settlement and close to their families.

La Pierre's House enjoyed a brief revival in 1925, under brothers named Jackson who abandoned it after ten years in favour of setting up a new store at Old Crow, which in turn ran until the end of the Second World War. By that time, the Northern Commercial Company, impressed with the fur potential of the region, moved into Old Crow with a store, house and supply boat.



A TRADING post operated by free-trader Philip Diquemare at Old Crow, Yukon where he met his wife, the former Pat Youngs, a most popular Public Health Nurse. The Diquemares now live in Whitehorse.

The move seemed justified that first year when 45,000 muskrat valued to \$2 apiece, were brought in. But the store 'went in the hole' and closed down about 1953. Joe Netro, already established at Old Crow and Whitestone Village took over the N.C. operation with the assistance of the Dept. of Indian Affairs. But, the following year, when Joe went to Fort Yukon for supplies, he stayed away long enough for word to reach Fort McPherson that Old Crow had no store.

The free trader at Fort McPherson wrote to Philip Diquemar in Quebec, asking, "You want to run a trading post in the middle of prime fur country with no competition?"

"Would I!" and Philip, armed with a business licence (a formality unique in the Yukon at that time) moved to Old Crow. He says, "That short time ago, whole families moved to Crow Flats for the winter fur. Young men helped with the trapping or hunting, women skinned and stretched the furs, cooked meals, mended moccasins.

Now, with families staying at the village, the hunter goes out reluctantly and returns home often and for several days at a time. Snowstorms cover his traps. Neglected, his prime furs become food for the wolverine."

Wien Alaska Airlines arrived Old Crow with mail. Glad to see Alaska plane in once a month." --Edith Josie

"Afternoon we saw DC3 fly around because no place to land. The sand bar is not much good. The camp is upriver not very far from town. So we always see plane and Helicopter fly around. Sure nice to see plane every day from camp." --Edith Josie

For 20 years pilots landed wheel aircraft, even to the DC3, on ever-changing sandbars that ranged in direction below the village to three miles upstream. At times of high water they took off into the surging river, props and wheels skiting water in all directions. Early winter found the



UNLOADING FREIGHT and mail for the village of Old Crow, Yukon. A number of Charter airlines have operated between Dawson City and Whitehorse to supply the isolated village on the Porcupine River.

Mail is delivered monthly by Wien out of Fairbanks, Alaska. Formerly 'dumped' at the border and picked up by the RCMP, permission was granted the airline to run right into Old Crow. At that time too, all Old Crow mail went out via Fort Yukon so that the only stamps in the village were American. However, an ubiquitous government visit caused a turmoil when one of the party was expected to use an American stamp to send a postcard to his home in Ottawa, and marked the end of the use of American stamps within the Dominion boundaries. A charter airline (Connelly-Dawson Airways) operating out of Dawson City, was authorized in February 1959, to carry the Old Crow mail. At the same time the people of the village were assured that they would not pay freight rates which, to Inuvik alone, amounted to 20¢ per pound. However, the Wien Skyvan aircraft still keeps a monthly schedule. "At noon

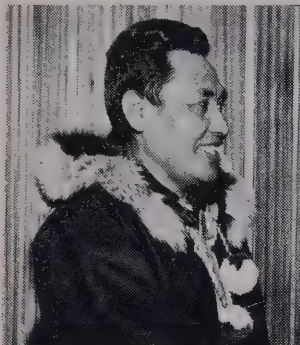
snowy riverbanks suitable for landing, after the Old Crow men trudged out a runway with snowshoes or, more recently, snow cruisers. If the landing field was on the opposite bank of the river the motor-driven plank boats used by the villagers pushed through thickening water and ice chunks, to carry passengers and freight to the village. After freeze-up the river itself was used as a runway.

Everyone helped with the fascinating task of unloading bundles, boxes, mail and were on hand to greet returning villagers or new visitors. Many of these represented departments of government. For many years government administration fluctuated between the Northwest Territories out of Aklavik, and Yukon out of Whitehorse not including the Department of Health which was Federal. The Old Crow Indian

band offered no objection to the complete transfer of administration to Whitehorse from Aklavik in 1959.

"RCMP aircraft arrived Old Crow with the Inspector just to see the two mounted police in Old Crow." --Edith Josie

The law is enforced by two constables assisted by Special Constable Peter Benjamin of Old Crow. Theft in the village is rare being confined to firewood or dried fish or possibly 'brew pots' of a bean liquor called *beanschew* which are illegal in themselves, so are not always reported stolen. As in all northern communities the abuse of liquor at Old Crow creates problems that involve the police. As well, gambling is a way of life for the Kutchin but is kept under surveillance as tempers sometimes flare.



PETER BENJAMIN, Special Constable with the R.C.M.P. at Old Crow, Yukon. While his wife Martha found time to train and enter, and win, international cross-country skiing and run the dogs turned over to her by the police when the Force turned to snow cruisers Peter became the leader for both Cubs and Scouts at the little village of 200 or so people.

The sick and disabled and old, the widows and deserted wives with or without children exist at Old Crow as elsewhere, assisted by relief of one sort or another that is administered by the police. The dominant position of the Chief, now Charlie Abel, has been steadily usurped by changes such as these, so that today in times of stress or danger, the people look first to the police for guidance. "The ice is getting thick so Mounted Police they saw some ice for water and also they saw ice for the school. The boys are busy with nets and haul wood for their house because they got nothing to do." --Edith Josie

Today, like any smart provider, a man in Old Crow jumps at the chance of a regular pay cheque, store account, a future for his children through school and education. The caribou still migrate around Old Crow although their presence is often announced by bush pilots. Men still run trapline into the far mountains.

Perhaps at an end however, is the wholesale trapping at Crow Flats which used to draw entire families out over the snow, their dog sleds piled high with canvas tents, food, stoves, traps and tools. Each family traps its own area, setting the muskrat traps in the push-ups or shelters or runways of the small ponds. The season ends in a flurry as 'rats are shot in the melting ponds and streams. As recently as ten years ago, a bag of 4,000 to 5,000 'rats per trapper resulted as families left for the Flats immediately after Easter. Now, however, that *evil day* -- leaving hearth and home -- is postponed until the end of May when trapping is not necessary and a .22 can do the same job more easily. Unfortunately pelts are no longer prime and worth less on the market.

'Rat trapping ends June 15, the going-out of the rivers and the canvas of sled and tent become the *canvas boats* that herald summer to the residents of Old Crow. A powerboat leaves the village and heads upstream to rendezvous with the trappers and drive the boats home; an airplane will follow.

At the Flats families make their way from lake to lake to a meeting place with a small creek and the Old Crow River. Once there, men chop and split with axes trees that are up to six inches through, bend and nail them into shape and let them dry for a week or so. When the time comes for the big departure, the tents are taken down and everything is piled ready to load. When the aircraft is heard the people stand very still -- too still. The pilot cannot see them.

Swinging low, he wonders if he has come to the right place. He looks for a spot to land on the rushing river, hoping to see that the people have arrived and he is not early. It is high water, the river running brown and flecked with foam, the countryside a drab brown as the green will not appear until the ice has gone. The people are inconspicuous in furs or moosehide. Finally seeing a place to land, the pilot puts down and ties his *Beaver* to a tree. Then plane-loads of dogs, kids, furs and some adults are flown home to Old Crow



CANVAS BOATS arrive at Old Crow, Yukon.

-- a people who are trapping in one century and travelling in another.

The aircraft leaves and the canvas boats are made ready. Large pieces of canvas are put over the frames and nailed through willow strips, becoming craft that weigh 300 pounds, but carry almost a ton. Spruce boughs are piled in the bottom and the boats are loaded. Sleds already packed with 1,000 pounds are set in the boats. Stoves and tools, food, furs, children and dogs are shoved in anywhere. Pots and pans, stove-wood, odd-sized bundles, are stuffed into bags made of caribou leg with scraped-skin bottoms (lately the bags are made of heavy canvas). Almost indestructable and waterproof, these are dragged behind sleds over the snow, or used in the boats.

Trapping all season in Crow Flats often means some shooting of caribou or moose, and meat from these hunts is piled in also. A particular prize might well be the white fur of an enormous Polar bear which inadvertently wander down from the Fish Hole on the Firth River.

Perhaps 20 of the canvas boats are tied together for the run down the Old Crow River to the Porcupine and two miles more to Old Crow, pushed by one small outboard. Often, one boat will hold nothing but dogs. Only stopping for tea, they run all day and throughout the light nights of early summer.

Inevitably it rains so that everybody is not only exhausted but soaking wet.

There is great excitement in the village at the first sighting of the canvas boats a few days later. Everyone runs to the riverbank. They cry, "It is all muddy!" Whereupon the old women scurry around getting willow wands to lay on the mud so the people can step out.

The need for a powered boat becomes apparent as an effort is made to turn the unwieldy canvas boats out of the current and into the shore. Sometimes the river takes control and they are pushed into a bay or eddy too far upstream; sometimes the snags and sweepers of fallen trees tip or menace the overloaded craft. But, the two or three days' journey comes to an end. Still tied together, the boats push into the willow-strewn shoreline and bedlam ensues. Dogs bark and race around delighted to be on shore again. Children yell. Old people try to hear how the trapping went.

As the canvas boats have replaced the skin boats, so the airplane is replacing the canvas boats; partly because the cost is less even though the nails are pulled and saved, and the canvas cleaned and dried for several years of use and partly because the people love to fly.

Bad accidents are common occurrences on these trips. The Public Health Nurse first arrived in 1964 and learned to make up packages like First Aid kits for the people to take with them to Crow Flats for the 'ratting season. The women use great common sense and originality in curing ills or mending injuries that can include burns, gunshot wounds and bad cuts.

Unlike some isolated Canadian settlements the succession of nurses, police, teachers, missionaries and government administrators have provided the people of Old Crow with exemplary models. This social innocence makes the people vulnerable on trips Outside while the village is becoming vulnerable as the Outside reaches in.

Changes in Old Crow economy that in the past have affected the people little, have snowballed since 1960 creating tensions in the village. The



POLICE DOGS have had their day in the North. The final dog patrol by the R.C.M.P. left Old Crow, Yukon on March 11, 1969 travelling over the mountains to visit posts on the

Mackenzie River, returning in April. Soon afterwards dogs were replaced by snow cruisers used not only by the police, but by the people of Old Crow.

old ways that made for a strong and effective people are fast fading beneath the crippling benevolence of government.

Until recently the RCMP in the north, as much as any native hunter, depended on dogteams for transportation. 'Bookkeeping' occupies much police time as they maintain a radio schedule with Inuvik and more distant points in the Western Arctic, register local births and deaths as well as marital status in the village. The Chief holds the hunting licence for the entire Old Crow band; game killed the previous year is registered and new licences are issued; checks are made on fur exports for tax purposes.

In particular, police patrols visited outlying cabins to check on the health and well-being of the solitary men or families hunting and trapping along the Porcupine River and into the mountains. The historic *long patrol* was run in March, an arduous exercise of men and dogs over the Rockies into the Mackenzie Valley and down north to the Arctic coast. The strength and stamina of their dogs meant life or death to constables on the lonely trail.

To feed their 25 - 30 dogs from September to May the men of the Old Crow detachment spent two weeks each summer netting (on a commercial fishing licence) about 2500 fish at a place 15 miles downriver. Of these, 500 fish were cleaned and 'dried'; the remainder became what the people call 'stick fish' -- not cleaned, a branch through the gills, five fish to a stick, and the sticks hung to dry on a lattice of cut trees.

Superintendent Fraser, in charge of G Division Yukon and NWT, felt that the strain of northern malemutes had weakened through in-breeding. As Officer-Commanding Aklavik sub-division from 1956-'58 he was familiar with northern dogs and with the demands of the Arctic patrols. With his announcement that the police would abandon the rangy malemute for the Siberian husky, donations of beautiful dogs came pouring in.

Word even reached the Walt Disney studio which had recently completed a film "Nikki, Wild Dog of the North" and had the star and her seven or eight stand-ins on its hands. These fine animals were donated to the RCMP as well.

In the spring of 1962 the huskies were sent first to Fort Norman, a major dog-breeding post, and then to the detachment on Herschel Island, an empty land where the dogs could run loose and food (seal and fish) was in good supply. Corporal Vitt, now of Faro (Yukon) was at Herschel that first summer and reports that all the dogs were given numbers, Nikki was re-named Lady and the other dogs called local names.

Cpl. Vitt was moved to Spence Bay on the Arctic Islands and in 1964 met a plane-load of sled dogs. First off the plane into the bitterest cold, was Nikki-Lady, only to freeze to death because there was no place ready for the dogs. Her offspring were among the dogs sent to Old Crow. They were taken in hand and trained by Constable Lyn Julian who ran them to victory in the 1967 Sourdough Rendezvous at Whitehorse.

It was to be the dogs' swang-song. Along with the

'old days, old ways' the sled-dogs have yielded pride of place to the snow cruisers. Although machines do run out of gas and 'go mechanical' and make a poor meal for a starving driver, they run for hours on a can of fuel whereas a working team of dogs must carry its own food for the length of a trip, which sometimes monopolizes the load. The last police patrol to use dogs left Old Crow March 11, 1969 on a circuit that included Arctic Red River on the Mackenzie River and return, in April. That fine team was turned over to Martha Benjamin who set up her own compound and accepted the dogs in the fall, then entered them in the 1970 Rendezvous.

Trader Joe Netro did return from Fort Yukon and ran his trading company at a profit for many years, despite competition from the free-trader from Quebec. For some years his supplies were flown in from Aklavik but the air freight costs were prohibitive. Instead, he began to have them sent in from Vancouver and four times each summer went downriver to Fort Yukon to pick up his load. Sometimes the Porcupine River is too shallow for boats and his runs were carefully timed so as to traverse the rapids and sandbars at the proper depth of water. Netro was quick to take advantage when the 'Brainstorm' a small river steamer began to operate out of Dawson City ten years ago.

But shortages have occurred, as chronicled by Edith Josie whose column in The Whitehorse Star is a continuing fascination to readers Outside. She writes: "About 8 or 10 years ago we have only Mr. Netro for our trader. And at that time for some reason Mr. Netro ran out of gasoline and kerosene and candles ... and there was no fuel for lights. Everybody have none. So the people use tallow for light; they tear off three narrow strip of cloth and they twist these together and soak it in the tallow and light it. It works well, just like candles but we keep putting chunk of tallow in it to keep it going. And here comes Airline loaded with gasoline and kerosene for Mr. Netro. Everyone rush to Netro store and bought gasoline and kerosene to fill their dry up gas lamps and kerosene lamps. Boy, was the lamp bright and now everyone throw their tallow light away." --Edith Josie

More recently Mr. Netro has retired and moved to Whitehorse, while his store is now a cooperative, with post office.

End of Part Two



LEAVING ON hunting trip for caribou down the Porcupine.

The Kutchin are settled now. Although nets are still set for dog salmon and berries are picked in season, the life has changed. Their repeating rifles have sharply reduced the caribou herds. Even so, the course of the wandering caribou is not a stream of life for them as before. The old ways are dying with the old people. The new ways are less of the land than of the store. The Vunta Kutchin today do not share the visions of the simple life -- the unlimited hunting, fishing and trapping -- dreamed by their fellow Canadians. Instead, "... through the traders we get fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, turkey and chicken, ice cream and everything." --Edith Josie

The adults of 20 to 40 years, who should be in

accepted, for the good of the children but at great price to the working, decision-making adults.

"With the building of the new airport, the establishment of drilling sites at Crow Flats, the proposed new government establishments in the village itself, all future decisions for Old Crow will be made with the whites in mind. The effect of the first traders will be multiplied and the Old Crow people will be angry, powerless and finally extinct." (Father Mouchet)

The young women tend to marry white men, and leave the village. The young men are less adaptable, want to marry Indian girls and return to the village. The independent attitude of the girls may rub off on the youths and encourage them to make a speedier transition from trapline to



THE FIRST skiers to leave Old Crow, Yukon and enter international competition. Back row, left to right: Ben Charlie, Isaac Thomas, Phares Thomas, Irwin Linklater, Doris Njootli, Abraham Peter, Susie Linklater. Front row: Father Mouchet, Martha Benjamin.

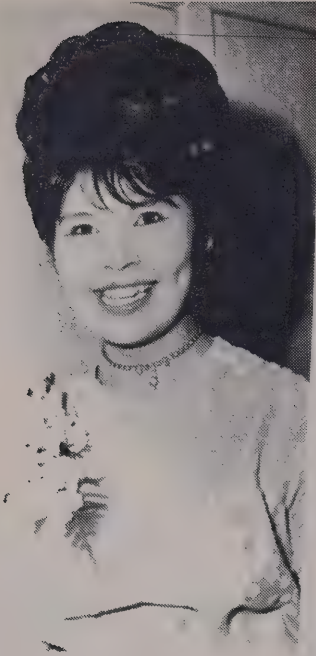
Ben Charlie and Martha Benjamin travelled to Maine and Montana where Ben finished in the top 10 and Martha entered the Mens Senior Race to come 29 out of 119. Going on to Ottawa Martha won the Canadian Womens Senior Cham-

pionship. The rest of the team went to Prince George for the Western Canada Championship, where they were defeated not only by fine skiers but by track and weather. The winner of the meet was the Finn, Venabo, Western Canada's Olympic skier, who some years later pushed for the inclusion of Yukon skiers in the Olympic program then getting underway, saying "They really beat the pants off me at the Sourdough Rendezvous ski meet following their defeat at Prince George.

trade. Some of the boys are doing well, at universities, in the Army, and in holding down regular jobs.

In the old days boys prepared for a life of hunting and trapping by getting up early and running in the snow, eating much dried meat to gain stamina for running down the moose. The old people became disturbed to see these same strong boys do little and eat a lot. Knowing this, a constable, P.A. Robin, himself a skier, decided to initiate skiing which had proven so successful with the Indians at his previous posting, Telegraph Creek. He told the parents, "Skiing, like snowshoe walking, toughens the runner. He learns to breath properly, pace himself."

Constable Robin ordered skis from Fairbanks



DORIS NJOOTLI of Old Crow, following her graduation (1965) from the hair dressing course offered by the Vocational School in Whitehorse, Yukon.

for himself, and showed the people how it was done.

Fortuitously, Father Mouchet, an experienced ski instructor of the French Army, arrived in Old Crow. Throughout the winter of '55 and the summer of '56 he studied the land and planned ski trails. In the fall Constable Robin and Father Mouchet met with the people and proposed a ski club, which was approved. A second meeting found the entire village present; the club was organized and a charter adopted. Every person became involved with the various committees, from Racing to Entertainment; everyone helped to clear the ski-track.

That December, an Edmonton (Alberta) newspaper reporter was in Old Crow and wrote about the Old Crow skiers. His article was picked up by the *Calgary Herald*. The Calgary Ski Club wrote to Old Crow asking if the embryo ski club would like some skis -- and proposed sending twelve pairs. The skis went *air freight* to Dawson City where Peel Plateau Explorations put them on their drill rig, which was going over the 'winter road' to the south end of the Porcupine River. Whereupon Constable Robin, accompanied by special constable Peter Benjamin and also Chief Charlie Peter Charlie, left by dog team to pick up the skis.

It was a 100 mile trip and took five days. "... all of it on snowshoes, the worst trip I've ever experienced," recalled Constable Robin.

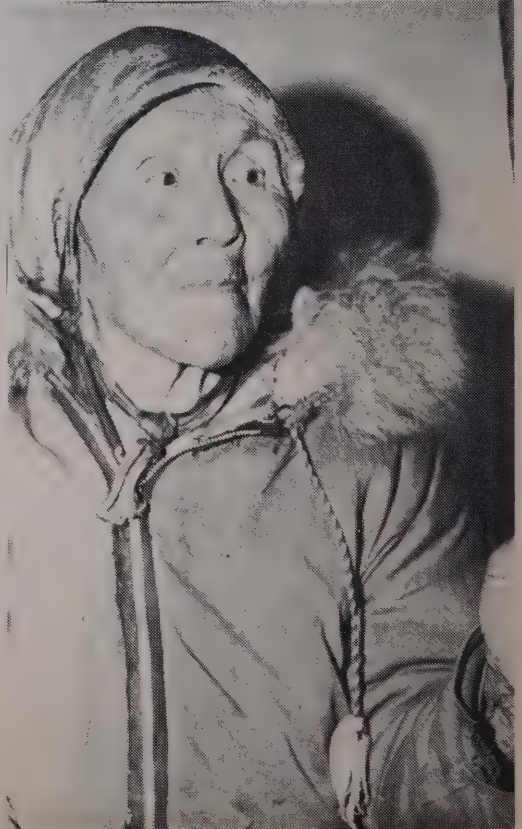
Each man had a dog team and sled to carry his tent and food for ten days, as well as his dogs' food. On the return trip was added the much-travelled skis. The weather was cold -- very

cold. On the last night, sounds of the oil camp came through the air. Rather than impose on the camp, the men decided to put up their tents for the night and arrive in the morning. Leaving early the next day, it was nevertheless many hours later when they reached the rig, where they discovered that the temperature was -58 degrees Fahrenheit accounting for their being able to hear the camp from so far away.

Father Mouchet says, "It is important to consider that the Vunta Kutchin ingeniously provided themselves with things they needed for their daily life, entirely from the fur and the game, fish and berries of the country *and* ran their own government for many, many generations. Once the whites turned up, the Indians admired their abilities, and went to them for decisions. The game they play with Nature they are going to play now with the government, but they can only lose."

He adds, "Even the ski program, which should have been welcomed, has not helped. Our government and others who should know better, hate success. It seems better to struggle amid much publicity, and win, than gain that success and publicity overnight."

For successful the ski program has certainly been. In 1957, on their new skis, the Old Crow Ski



MYRA KAY - 84 in 1970.

Club members began lessons and practice that went on despite the intense cold. Some opposition to the skiing sprang up, some skiers dropped out; but the classes continued along lines laid out by Father Mouchet. Soon the skiers were qualified to enter competition. Those original competitors included Martha Benjamin, Phares Thomas, Isaac Thomas, Erwin Linklater, Abram Peter, Susy Linklater and Doris Njootli.

They were not only qualified to enter -- they won! Trophies, to North American and European championships began to come back home to Old Crow from races held at Whitehorse, Anchorage (Alaska) and even farther afield. Despite some local criticism of skiing that included the complaint, "There is no money in it," the Old Crow skiers themselves are proud of their trophies and their good names as sportsmen.

Father Mouchet developed the ski program with more-than-usual-care in order to use it as a launching pad to successful lives for his young skiers.

Called TEST (Territorial Experimental Ski Training) it is an experimental program based on hard but correct training over a long period of time, in order to trigger *motivation* in the skier, and giving him or her a better chance to adapt; although what they will finally choose to do is not important, in Father Mouchet's estimation.

The program has gone through several crisis -- partly due to lack of government support and recognition, partly to the wrangling within some clubs. While government looks for ways to assist the native peoples, it overlooks the already-proven initiative sparked in the skiers by the TEST program. As Father Mouchet complains, money is spent providing welfare to the tune of millions of dollars. Whereas, for a mere \$150,000 a year, the ski program would do a better job and make resolute adults out of children.

School principal Dave Brekke said, "I worked with Father Mouchet at Old Crow and in Whitehorse, at Takhini School. At Old Crow particularly, I saw how the skiing knitted the entire village into a proud whole. Once," he recalled, "the ski team was racing at Winnipeg. I went into the Whitehorse Inn for a drink and met a real crowd of people from Old Crow. I had no idea so many were in town. They had congregated at the Inn, even the non-drinkers, to celebrate the girls' big win. All kept saying, 'How nice it was!'"

Father Mouchet reported, "The first groups failed to measure up to the original standards. They were, of course, of all ages and still close to the old ways and unsure of the new. However, in the fall of '69 four girls were chosen by the Canadian Amateur Junior Ski Team. These girls were part of the original six who were in the ski program that was rejuvenated in 1966 by Mr. Brekke and BethAnn Exham, the wife of the minister Rev. Kenah Exham. One Old Crow boy drew to a level equal to the best skiers in Inuvik, which has produced champions. These skiers are greatly admired by the younger children who hope to take part in the program and are our future champions. Using the school and the teachers, the TEST program can be measured in points. It eliminates favoritism and the paternalism so disliked by the people."

"And," he added, "the ski teams that competed in Europe made a remarkable discovery -- as part of the skiing fraternity they fitted in, felt welcome, taken for what they were -- good skiers. They began to come out of their shells, relax and talk in company."

TEST now operates at Old Crow as a community project that has a board of directors of Old Crow people, assisted by interested whites who have been posted to the village, as teachers, storekeepers, police. At Inuvik where it was initiated in 1964, and in 1968 put in the capable hands of Bjorga Peterson. At Whitehorse, Takhini School has a board of directors and Father Mouchet as Team Manager.

First Old Crow champion was Martha Benjamin, wife of the special constable Peter Benjamin. With many children and a busy community life, she nevertheless found the stamina and direction to practice, enter and win the North American cross-country ski championship in 1963. Martha is sister to Stephan Frost, well known dog musher, whose daughters carry on the championship strain, with fifteen-year-old Mary retaining the Canadian Junior cross-country skiing crown at Mt. St. Anne, Quebec on February 25, '71 while sister Glenna took *first*- and *second* in the Junior Ladies' Event at the North American cross-country ski championships in Barrie, Ontario. The Senior Ladies' was won by the Firth twins, Shirley and Sharon, prime examples of the TEST program being run at Inuvik, NWT.

Competitive dog mushing offers a similar challenge to veteran Old Crow trappers Stephan Frost, Paul Ben Kassi, Stephan Njootli and John Joseph Kay. Their victories in Alaska and Whitehorse are even more extraordinary considering that their dogs are work-dogs, their sleds of heavy wood and canvas, in a field that has developed a light and tiny sled and bred a new, swift animal. The Old Crow men have learned that their rangy brutes can be bred into racing dogs and Stephan Frost, in particular, has improved his teams.

Today dogs are out, skidoos are in. The face of the north is changing rapidly. However, at Old Crow, dogs still outnumber people approximately 300-212. Last winter, men who had turned to snow cruisers found that their care and feeding was a little more than throwing a frozen fish and shouting Mush-on! By spring, the snowy landscape was livened by a liberal sprinkling of colourful non-operable machines, abandoned where they stood until parts or gas were supplied.



RIVERBOAT "Brainstorm".



CONSTABLE LYNN Julian with "Gook" - leader of the RCMP dog team that won the 1967 Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous in Whitehorse, Yukon.

The riverboat "*Brainstorm*" freighting out of Dawson City depends upon the depth of water in the Porcupine River and sometimes manages four trips each summer. The RCMP keeps track of its departure time from Dawson and arrival five days later at Fort Yukon, and three days after that up the Porcupine to Old Crow. "Late at midnight the *Brainstorm* arrived Old Crow. Glad to see all the crew in the boat. They really work so fast and unload the boat, make fast trip back to Dawson." --Edith Josie

When the boat is expected, the more venturesome Old Crow people boat downriver to meet it, usually above Rampart House. When the labouring engines are heard at the village, people run from house to house calling 'boat coming' so that by the time the *Brainstorm* ties up everyone in Old Crow is there to meet it. They wait patiently for Customs clearance, then go aboard for tea and cakes. All the young men help with the unloading of heavy equipment, machinery and goods for the store, working around the clock in the broad daylight of summer.

The Anglican Church continues to influence the people of Old Crow although a Catholic mission was established in 1954 by Fathers Buellard and Plain. Two and sometimes three services are held on Sundays at St. Luke's with or without a minister, with a catachist speaking in the native tongue. The Old Church, built in 1924, saw the first Old Crow wedding of Stephan Frost's parents Harold (Jack) Frost and Clara (of Peter Moses family at Bluefish). When the New Church was built, the first marriage was of Martha Frost, to Peter Benjamin (RCMP Special Constable). St. Luke's WA (Womens' Auxiliarily) was founded in 1931 for the purpose of organizing Christmas and Easter festivities.

That remote Old Crow is aware of the world and its problems was brought to light during World War II. Word of the bombings of London in the early days of the war reached Chief Peter Moses. At his suggestion, several hundred dollars were raised by his villagers and sent as a gift to orphans of the blitz. Clothing, bought with the money, was distributed personally by the Canadian High Commissioner Vincent Massey. These proceedings were followed by the BBC and made newspaper headlines which resulted in touching letters of thanks and remembrance from English children, to the people of Old Crow.

Similar contributions were made throughout the war years, and later for Red Cross and Korean Relief.

The ladies of the WA particularly enjoy study groups with subjects ranging from missionary work in Japan and Africa to problems of church unity.

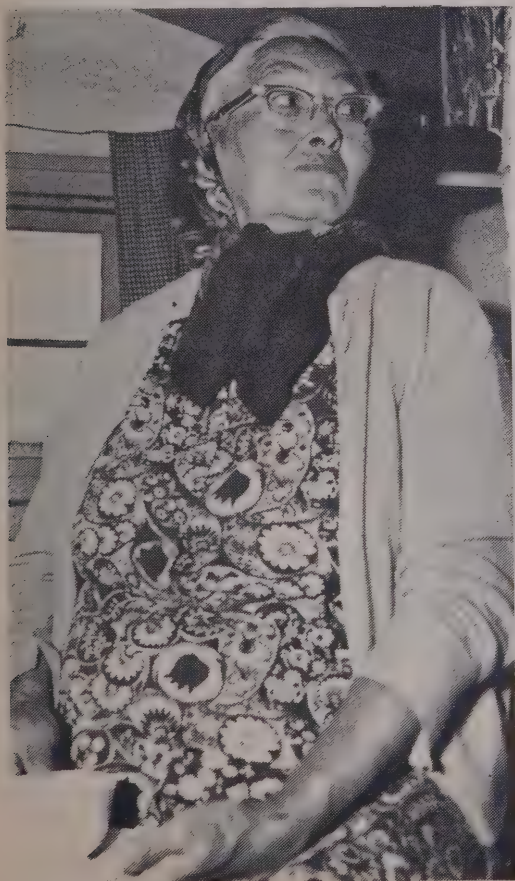


ALTAR CLOTH of bleach moosehide, embroidered with beads, made by the Womens Auxiliary of St. Luke's Anglican Church, on the occasion of the new church. --Photo: Douglas Leechman, courtesy National Museum of Canada.

Old superstitions which included legends of giants and dwarfs and monsters to be found on Crow Flats have faded with the everyday organizations of the church. The Anglican Mens Club elects church wardens and otherwise directs work within the church including, in 1935, the community hall which is used for band meetings, feasts and dances, and in 1950 the new church.

The shaman has gone the way of the brushman (or boogymen) of the Kutchin, lost with the loss of fears and violence inherent in their early life. A second WA, made up of younger women, was organized several years ago to raise funds for the missionary society and attend to the annual graveyard cleanup ... "afternoons women and men are cutting grass and clean around the mission and the church ... look better." --Edith Josie

Only two weddings have been held over the past ten years. Funerals, accompanied by a fearful keening, are more numerous ... "My mother Elizabeth Josie pass away on August 9, 1967 ... everyone attend her funeral ... a big thank you for Reverend Exham of Old Crow and to Reverend Simon of Fort McPherson for the wonderful Holy Communion services they hold for our mother every Sunday before her death.



MRS. CLARA FROST who has long been known as "the knitter" for the people of Old Crow, Yukon.

"Also, for those who made the coffin. It was a wonderful coffin and the women made a nice cross with spruce branches all decorated with flowers." --Edith Josie

The Yukon, and in particular small villages such as Old Crow, offers opportunity for those people who can contribute a talent without upsetting the balance already arrived at by northern man in his environment. One such was Sam the Stove Man, who died in 1968, age 91 ... "Too bad we hear Mr. Sam Olson pass away in Dawson ... spent many years in Old Crow and making iron stoves for all the people." --Edith Josie

"As Mrs. Lucey taught us" is still the pattern for many tasks done by the women in keeping their homes and their church clean and attractive. A widow with a son and daughter, Mrs. Lucey was 60 years of age when she went, in 1950, to spend several years in Old Crow. Not as young as would make her new life easier Mrs. Lucey suffered terribly from the severe cold. Hearing of this, the WA of the church at Vancouver sent her a fur coat, which to the amusement of the villagers, she wore day and night.

Despite the name Porcupine for the river that runs past the village, and the number of porkies which inhabit the region, the women of Old Crow do not use porcupine quills for decorative purposes. Some of this 'ancient' work does exist in the village, but is Delta-made, at Aklavik or perhaps at Fort McPherson.



OLD CHIEF Peter Moses and Myra.

There is an unspoken courtesy to handicrafts in this village of 200 souls, that encourages talent without duplicating effort. One example is Clara Frost, 'the knitter' who knits sox, mitts and storm cuffs for local sale, but does not do beadwork. Beadwork is the chief decoration on slippers, gauntlets and jackets made today. The Old



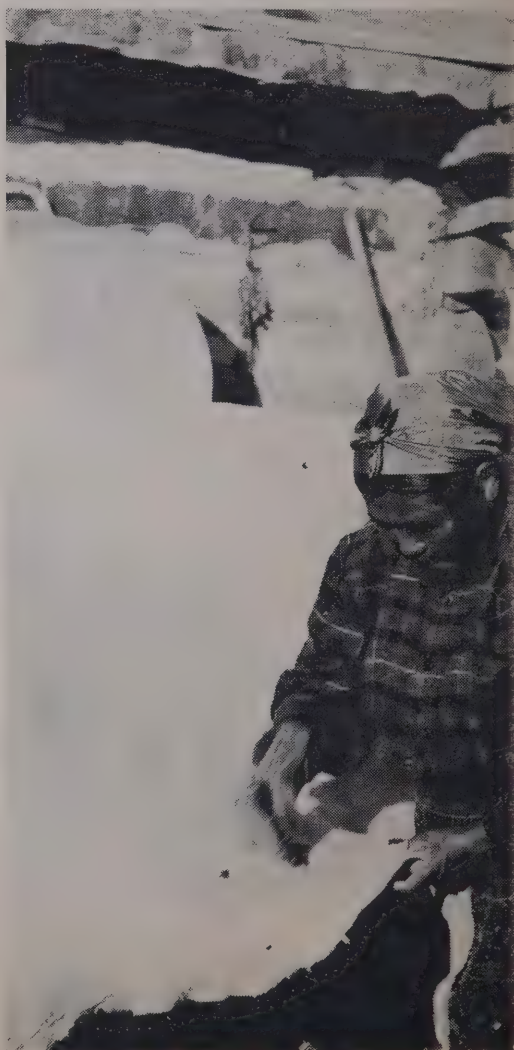
ETHEL (Mrs. Stephen) Frost of Old Crow, Yukon wearing a rabbit fur parka lavishly decorated with beadwork in the OLD CROW ROSE design.

Crow rose is a favorite while Grecian and concentric or geometric designs are being devised by Ellen (Mrs. Robert) Bruce.

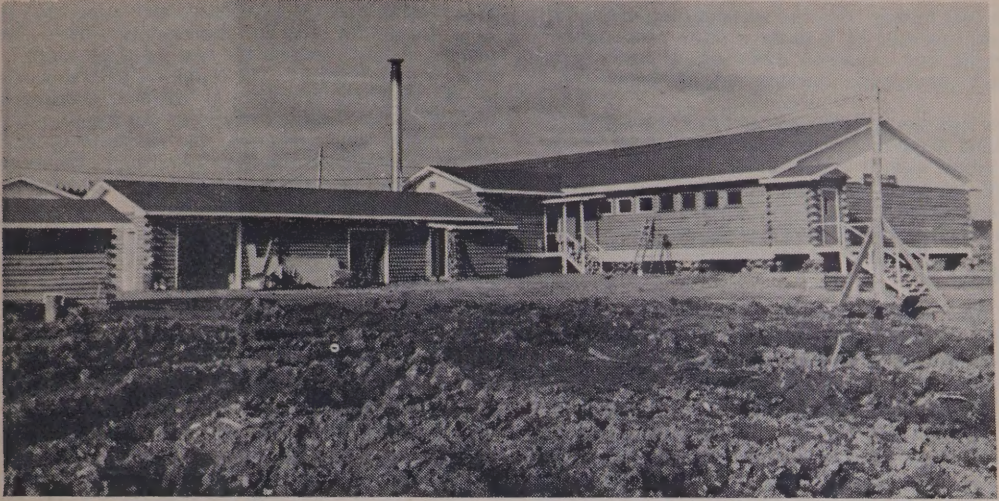
The 'carver' is Lazarus Charlie, whose dogteams with sleighs and fork and spoon serving sets are for sale and can be seen in many Old Crow homes. Snowshoes are made by most of the people, but the 'snowshoe maker' is Old Peter Charlie. In his younger days he travelled many miles to Red Bluff (a place with historical significance to the people of Old Crow) for the red rock that he pounded into powder, making a distinctive ochre with which he stained the

willow and birch frames. Still making snowshoes his only concession to his age is in the use of store-bought stains.

The natural economy which kept the village stable for many years has been grossly disturbed since 1960, when the Federal government 'discovered' Old Crow and began a series of interventions that changed the trapping-trading economy into an administrative one. In the past, the police bought wood from those who would cut and sell it. The town **woodpile** which stretches along the riverbank suffered when the new school was authorized several years ago, the government paying \$3.50 per hour for men to work on the log building. This was followed by a new airfield (located just behind the village) so that the old wage scale has become obsolete -- to no advantage. What other building will go up? What other project can these people work at that



MRS. ELIAS, a Loucheux Indian of Old Crow, Yukon scraping a moosehide which can then be made into clothing and moccasins. --Photo Douglas Leechman, courtesy National Museum of Canada.



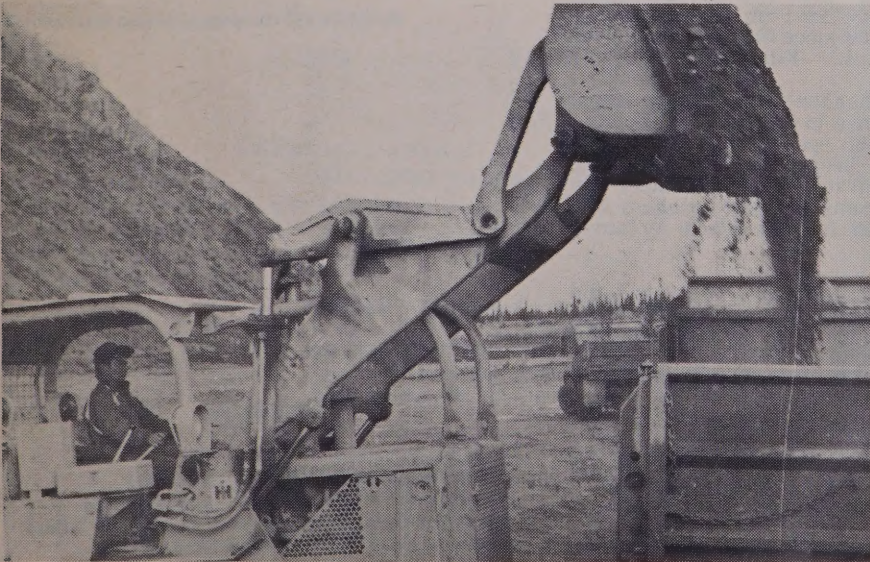
NEW SCHOOL at Old Crow

does not call for more education and training than they have at present? The pleasures encountered in having 'things' was made apparent at a recent church function, when the men who had worked at both developments showed off their new snow cruisers and roared around with childish delight at the speed and noise. Young girls, many years their junior, were embarrassed by these antics in front of visitors and whispered angrily, "Those kids!"

The discovery of oil in the Crow Flats and the effect of drilling or development on the muskrats which inhabit it in their millions, made

newspaper headlines for most of 1970. There has been a reserve, or land set aside for use by the Old Crow people only, to be free from exploitation without permission of the band, by mining or oil interests. This reserve of 350 square miles, which is about $17\frac{1}{2}$ x 20 miles, runs from ... the Flats north of Old Crow Mountain, east to the edge of Crow Flats, south to a point near Tack Lake, west to Porcupine River and north to Crow Mountain. This reserve does not include Crow Flats which, under the laws of Canada, is protected as a natural habitat.

Crow Flats is a remarkable region being six to



ANDREW CHARLIE operating a loader, during the building of the airport.

Eight feet higher than the surrounding areas. It is held together by a natural dam that could -- ecologist cry -- vanish overnight if broken by seismic blast or inadvertant drilling operations.

There has been a twelve-year limit to leases, but the land around Old Crow that was 'given away' ten years ago at rock-bottom prices, has suddenly spiralled in value and interest. Now, leasing terms and fees are being suspended in a belated government effort to retain more of the profits as did Alaska with her North Slope oil interests.

The first winter road (a road punched across frozen swamp and muskeg that allows men and equipment to move into areas inaccessible in summer) saw the first truck reach Old Crow in the winter of '69, and will permit access to Old Crow Flats only 20 miles away. But, as one trapper cried, "Crow Flats are our bank. We need them." Such protests are as lonely as the loon's cry, for, despite this oil, fur and recreation potential of Old Crow and the athletic prowess of its people a government report states flatly "the only economic base for the village is the manufacture of sleeping bags."

On this and other matters every word that comes out of Old Crow is given space in newspapers and magazines ... "so in meeting, Joe Kay make a speech for old days how people make their living in Flat and also in the woods. So he just wish people could speak out and talk for their country. He is right to say this because people need Crow Flat and they need the ground for trapping.

"They can't have job every year, only time they had Job in Old Crow for new Houses and Co-op store but the money is go out just like nothing.

"Old Crow is a small town and not many people and not many white. Like 1930 or 1954 nobody know about Old Crow but I am pretty sure that people know Old Crow since the news go all over Canada and the States." --Edith Josie

Today, even more than the police, it is the school that is the great mover in the Old Crow society. The original school opened in 1924 at the Anglican mission became a two-room log building. Later still it was a government day school with four rooms and four teachers who prepared 85 students for high school at Inuvik and Whitehorse.

And now, Father Mouchet says, "We must build on what exists. Old Crow is in transition, and its young people will face a future very different from any experienced by the present adults. Only in athletics can they 'stand tall' and in this we must help them. Although hunting and trapping will continue, most of the school children of today probably can't cope with the life. Some will manage to combine the old ways of the trapline and caribou hunting in season, while taking on jobs in the village in maintenance or janitor work."

He feels that the airport will create a division of society such as has resulted at Carmacks and Upper Liard where the Indians in the community live separately to the whites.

Whereas the romantic-minded are sure the old ways made for sturdy, independent lives the people of Old Crow find the new ways pleasant ... "just like holidays." The traplines grown short, as shown by the granting of trapping privileges to McPherson Indians eager to tap the marten-rich mountains between the territories and within the range of the Old Crow band. Whereas other Canadians are searching for remote corners, peace and quiet, room to grow ... the Vuntu Kutchin are widening their contacts, accepting involvement, encouraging modernization in this most remote settlement of Canada's north -- Old Crow, Yukon.

THE END



MARTHA KENDI spots caribou on the mountain.

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